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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the questions of whether or not previous knowledge of Spanish (oral and/or written) interferes with an English as a second language (ESL) student's acquisition of English reading skills, which skills are affected, and what classroom techniques are successful in dealing with it. Two contrasting views of reading are examined: emphasis on oral reading skills and on reading for meaning. A review of the current literature includes: (1) tables illustrating sociolinguistic differences between Black English speakers and Spanish-speaking ESL students, (2) conclusions based on current literature and the author's experiences, and (3) Spanish vs. English sound/symbol relationships. Problems that are identified with the current literature are the undefined use of the terms "bilingual" and "bilingualism," the nonlinguistic use of the term "interference," failure to distinguish between interference and insufficient knowledge of English, and misinterpretations of sources. "Do's" and "don'ts" for teaching ESL reading to native speakers of Spanish and a bibliography are included. (Author/SW)

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF SPANISH LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE IN E.S.L. READING

A Paper

Presented to

Dr. C. E. Fishburn

San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Course

795A Seminar in Reading Literature

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by

Linda K. Williams

May 1978

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

PRESENTATION

Many educators have made assumptions about the amount of negative influence that an English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) student's prior knowledge of Spanish can be expected to have on his success in learning to read English. Some express the opinion that the only way to turn a Spanish-speaker into a good English reader is to have him forget his Spanish (Carter, 1970), and that teaching a Spanish-speaker to read in Spanish will have no positive effect on his readiness or ability to learn to read in English.

This opinion appears to be based on the presupposition that there is a tremendous amount of negative transfer from Spanish to English of reading-readiness, reading, and/or basic language skills, and that no significant amount of positive transfer can or does take place. There are, however, instances wherein a great deal of positive transfer of skills does indeed take place (Thonis, 1970; Kaufman, 1968). But it is also true that the existence of a large amount of positive transfer of skills from Spanish to English does not preclude the

existence of a significant amount of negative transfer (interference), and it has indeed been evident that in certain instances, prior knowledge of Spanish (both oral and written) definitely does interfere with the acquisition of what are commonly considered English reading skills.

The questions set forth below are the result of an effort to further investigate and define the frequency, extent, nature, and significance of specific instances of interference from Spanish language skills found in the English reading habits of E.S.L. students.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is generally agreed that Spanish-speakers who have limited or no knowledge of English when entering a school in the United States have more difficulties in learning to read in English than do native speakers of English. It is assumed by many educators, but not as clearly documented, that it is the former students' previous knowledge of Spanish that is hindering or interfering with their acquisition of English reading skills. The purpose of this paper is to examine this assumption. More specifically, it is an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Are all, some, or none of the difficulties experienced by Spanish-speakers learning to read in

English caused by their previous knowledge of Spanish?

2. If the answer to the above question is "all," or "some," in what specific ways does previous knowledge of Spanish interfere with the acquisition of which English reading skills?

3. What are some implications for teachers of E.S.L. reading to native Spanish speakers?

IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The importance of these questions can be seen quite clearly when one considers the record of low academic achievement and the high drop-out rate of Spanish-speakers in schools in the United States (U.S. Commission of Civil Rights, 1971 and 1972). Since reading ability is perhaps the single most important skill needed to assure academic achievement (Olguin, 1968; Saville and Troike, 1971) a better understanding of the difficulties faced by limited and non-English speakers attempting to learn to read English should benefit both teachers and students of E.S.L. reading.

LIMITATIONS

In order to deal effectively with the questions raised, this paper is limited to a consideration of the following:

1. Only Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students, not native speakers of other languages. (Note: This category includes Spanish-speaking children who enter the school as limited or non-English speakers. The investigator's use of the term "E.S.L. student" does not apply to the child who enters the school truly bilingual, i.e., with full, native-like proficiency in both English and Spanish, and it would cease to apply to an E.S.L. student who achieves that level of language proficiency.)

2. Only their experiences with reading (not oral language skills or writing).

3. Only reading in English (not reading in Spanish, except as the basis for comparison).

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

GENERAL CONTRASTIVE ANALYSES

The literature was replete with contrastive analyses of Spanish with English, offering numerous examples and discussions of ways in which interference from Spanish is manifested in the speech and writing of E.S.L. students (Saville and Troike, 1971; Olguin, 1968; Mathewson and Pereyra-Suarez, 1975; Ziros, 1976; and García, 1974a and b). While these sources very rarely made reference to E.S.L. reading, this investigator considered these general contrastive analyses quite pertinent to the more limited concern of the manifestations of interference in E.S.L reading skills. The examples and discussions found were most often categorized by the linguistic level at which the interferences occur (i.e., phonological, morphological, lexical/semantic, and syntactic).

Phonological interference has been the level most commonly discussed; indeed, Modiano (1973), Olguin (1968), and Mathewson and Pereyra-Suarez (1975) chose to address the problem of language interference at only that level.

Modiano stated that an E.S.L student is "incapable

of distinguishing many of the sounds of the foreign language, especially those which do not involve minimal contrasts in his own" (p. 30).

Mathewson and Pereyra-Suarez (1975) further explained that research has "shown that there are sounds which listeners with a standard English background discriminate, but which may be confused by listeners with a Spanish language background" (p. 187). The authors' findings supported their hypothesis that previous knowledge of Spanish interferes with auditory conceptualization in English, as shown by the fact that Mexican-American children score lower in auditory conceptualization on a text including phonemes which do not exist, or are used interchangeably in Spanish, than they do on a "noninterference" test.

Olguin (1968) referred only briefly to interference at the syntactic level. The remainder of his text was devoted to the identification, understanding, and remediation of interference at the phonological level. Olguin stated that an E.S.L. student's "auditory discrimination and speaking habits--mouth muscles, tone, word order, breath control--of Spanish, impede his acquisition of the English language" (p. 9). Olguin's book, Shuck Loves Chirley, contains a very helpful and nontechnical description of the aspects of English pronunciation which

predictably cause difficulties for Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students, including a diagnostic test and demonstration lessons.

Ziros (1976) reported that in addition to phonological interference:

> On the sentence level, the Chicano may also experience both morphological and lexical interference. That is, he may intermingle grammatical structures and vocabulary from both languages (p. 285).

(Note: The terms "Spanish-speaking E.S.L. student" and "Chicano" are not interchangeable, i.e., not all Chicanos --a term often used to refer to persons living in the United States who are of Mexican descent, or "Mexican-Americans"--enter school speaking limited or no English, and are, therefore, not all "E.S.L. students." However, with the relatively few exceptions of Spanish-speaking students who have come from countries other than Mexico, all Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students are often referred to as Chicanos.)

Further, Ziros cited O'Brien (1973) as support for her statement, "In the public schools, most Chicano students are compound rather than coordinate bilinguals" (p. 285). Saville and Troike (1971) defined a compound bilingual as:

> . . . an individual who translates from one language to the other . . . does not keep language systems separate, and experiences considerable interference between them. [and a coordinate bilingual as one] . . . who has two separate language systems . . . which cause minimal interference with each other (p. 7).

However, Ziros later cautioned that much more research is needed on lexical/semantic interference.

Saville and Troike (1971) explained phonological interference as follows:

> Foreign sounds are not heard as such, but rather are unconsciously and automatically pigeonholed in one of the pre-existing categories of the native language. . . . It is not that they are inherently incapable of hearing the particular differences, but rather that they have been conditioned not to, by their previous experience with their own language (p. 13).

They went on to state that comparable problems occur in grammar and vocabulary, and cited numerous examples of these types of interference. The authors did not offer any examples of morphological interference as they apply to Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students, though they did give an example of morphological interference in the speech of an English-speaker learning Spanish.

While Mathewson and Pereyra-Suarez (1975) investigated only one aspect of the interference problem (i.e., phonological interference with auditory conceptualization, and thus with reading), they also reported that

"Johnson (1938) has demonstrated Spanish language interference with lexical development, [and] Carrow (1971) has shown syntactic interference . . ." (p. 194).

García (1974b) cited and discussed examples of interference on the phonological, morphological, and lexical/semantic levels (e.g., "Your mother is planching." [planchar means "to iron".]). García concurred with Ziros in the belief that "Adequate research exists on the phonological and morphological components; more is needed on the syntactic component; little has been done on the semantic component, and yet the semantic component may be the most important" (p. 37).

INTERFERENCE IN ORAL READING SKILLS

Despite the abundance of literature concerning the ways in which previous knowledge of Spanish interferes with the acquisition of standard English by E.S.L. students, there were relatively few reports on the effects that these points of interference between the two languages may have on an E.S.L. student's learning to read in English.

When literature was found which directed attention to the question of if and/or how previous knowledge of Spanish can or does interfere with the acquisition of English reading skills, it became evident that, while the

literature was valuable and useful to a certain degree, it left unanswered many important questions concerning E.S.L. reading. The problem was that by far most authors limited themselves to a discussion of the types and examples of interference that are manifested in oral reading skills, and disregarded the question of the effect that this has (or might have) on the E.S.L. reader's ability to comprehend English reading material. This may well result in many educators concluding that the only interference-based problems encountered by E.S.L. readers lie in the phonological aspect of the students' reading performance. This might also lead to the erroneous conclusion that, once an E.S.L. student is taught to read orally using Standard English pronunciation and intonation, he then will also comprehend the English material he reads.

An example of those authors who limited themselves to a discussion of oral reading skills is Olguin (1968), who entitled his book on interference at the phonological level, How to Unlock Some of the Secret Reading Troubles in--Shuck Loves Chirley. In the book, Olguin stated, "We must agree that a child cannot read what he cannot hear" (p. 9).

Also, in the foreword, it was explained that Olguin had identified and classified communication problems encountered by Mexican-American students, and then developed new teaching strategies which are presented in Shuck Loves Chirley. The claim was made that as a result of instruction in areas of predictable phonological interference, "The children learned to listen, read, write and speak more accurately and quickly" (p. 3). The fact that Olguin considered oral reading skills of prime importance is illustrated by his definition of reading, given as a part of the premise for his book. His definition is as follows: ". . . reading is an abstract form of hearing and understanding what is 'heard' through the eyes" (p.9). This presupposes that, even in silent reading, the reader must connect the printed symbols to their correct oral equivalent in order to successfully read words, sentences, and discourse.

Similarly, while Saville and Troike's (1971) book, A Handbook of Bilingual Education, provides educators with a most practical and informative introduction to bilingual education, the only references by the authors to interference as seen in E.S.L. reading skills concerned what appear to be oral reading skills. The authors stated that:

> Speakers of other languages find stress and intonation patterns very difficult to

> master, and have particular trouble with reading because of the lack of marking in writing, which masks the distinctions of speech (p. 44).

The authors also refer to the oral reading problem caused by words containing phonemes which are difficult for the Spanish-speaker to perceive and pronounce.

While the above authors made it clear elsewhere in their books that they do value reading comprehension, they did not discuss the relationship between the oral reading difficulties they described and the E.S.L. students' comprehension of the material read. However, the addition of a discussion of language interference as it affects reading comprehension--rather than only oral production--would make these sources even more valuable to educators.

THE PROPER ROLE OF ORAL READING

A number of educators question the importance of oral reading in general, and specifically when dealing with students who are not native speakers of standard English.

Platt (1977) cited some advantages of having any child read silently rather than orally. She stated,

> Children who silently read written phrases . . . are less handicapped by the additional vocal actions of pronunciation and intonation, which are really not necessary for reading with speed and understanding (p. 267).

Curry and Geis (1977) specifically warned against sight oral reading, which is a common practice in numerous classrooms (including, of course, numerous E.S.L. students). The authors stated that the few individuals who have "developed the essential competencies to read orally by sight in an effective manner, . . .[are rare exceptions]. Yet, in classrooms, teachers persist in requiring students to read orally with no previous preparation" (p. 189).

They warned that quite often this results in a blow to the reader's self-esteem, and that therefore, "sight oral reading can only be justified for diagnostic purposes; an essential means for identifying specific reading skill strengths and weaknesses," (p. 189) and that a trust relationship between the reader and the diagnostician must be established previously in order to protect the reader's self-image.

Bloomfield (1973) discussed the related topic of subvocalization while reading. He stated that,

> When the literate adult reads very carefully, . . . he actually goes through this process of internal speech; his conventional way of reporting this is that he internally pronounces or "hears himself say" the words of the text. The highly skilled reader has trained himself beyond this: he can actually shunt out some of the internal speech-movements and respond to a text without seizing every word (p. 233).

Goodman (1970) further established the subordinate position of correct pronunciation of words to the all-important question of whether or not the reader is attaching the correct meaning to the print. Goodman stated that:

> In some instances, of course, the reader may form a fairly accurate definition of the word, even if he never recognizes it (that is, matches it with a known oral equivalent) or pronounces it correctly. . . . This phenomenon is familiar to any adult reader. Each of us has many well-defined words in our reading vocabulary which we either mispronounce or do not use orally (p. 501).

This view was further discussed by Goodman and Burke (1971) as follows:

> It does not harm a reader to have words in his reading vocabulary which he does not pronounce in the expected manner. This is common to all proficient readers and is supported by the fact that a proficient reader's reading vocabulary is greater than his speaking vocabulary. What is important is that a reader develop a concept for a significant word or phrase regardless of pronunciation (p. 102).

Goodman (1970) also affirmed that as a student,

> . . . develops reading skill and speed, he uses increasingly fewer graphic clues. Silent reading can then become a more rapid and effective process than oral reading (p. 504).

This is partially because the reader then does not have to divide his attention between the tasks of attaching

meaning to the print and that of producing correct oral interpretation of the print.

The above sources support the claim that an oral (or even an internally-vocalized) response to the printed page is not necessary for a person to have read the material effectively, and that oral production should not be considered a reading skill. Instead, comprehension is considered of prime importance. The following writers explored the question of the importance of accurate (i.e., Standard English) oral reading, as it relates specifically to E.S.L. students.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ORAL PRODUCTION TO READING COMPREHENSION

Mathewson and Pereyra-Suarez (1975) reported that,

> The results of the study have indicated that there was indeed Spanish language interference with auditory conceptualization. However, the potential importance of this finding was diminished by the further result that degree of interference was not significantly related to reading ability (p. 194).

To judge reading ability, the authors used the Wide Range Achievement Test, oral reading of individual words section, and the Cooperative Primary Test, silent reading comprehension both of individual words and of connected discourse sections.

García (1974b) stated that language interference,

> . . . is important only to the extent that the interferences cause the Chicano serious language developmental problems. If latinated [sic] phonemes . . . do little to hamper the Chicano's cognitive activities in the school, then there is little need for concern (p. 36).

In citing García (1974b) as her source, Ziros (1976) interpreted the former's comments as follows:

> García agrees that interferences do exist on the phonological level but questions their importance. . . . García (1974b) says that unless interferences occur on the syntactic and semantic levels, that is, on levels that are key to meaning and hence to communication, the problem is not paramount (p. 286).

Ziros, therefore, recommended that:

> . . . the assumption that the Chicano's bilingualism per se causes language interference and is detrimental to learning to read English must continue to be tested, with a focus on the semantic component and a move away from examining phonological and morphological differences (p. 288).

Venezky and Chapman (1973) did not specifically discuss Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students, but rather "speakers of nonstandard English dialects" and the question of "how much of learning to read is potentially dialect bound" (p. 62). The authors stated that current research cannot be said to have answered definitively the question of "whether existing initial reading materials impose comprehension burdens on nonstandard speakers more so than on standard speakers" (p. 68) However, the

authors went on to state that:

> It is clear that syntactic differences exist between standard and nonstandard dialects, . . . but the existing data relate almost exclusively to production; there is no corresponding body of data on comprehension. . . . Even if we could show a comprehension deficit in non-standard speakers for certain typical reading materials, we would still have to show both that this deficit interfered with learning to read and that this deficit was greater than that suffered by standard speakers when confronted with the same vapid and emasculated offerings of present-day reading materials (p. 68).

The authors concluded that:

> . . . there is little direct interference of dialect with reading--but an enormous potential for indirect interference. Indirect interference can arise either through the failure of the teacher to recognize what is regular and what is aberrant for a particular dialect and to act accordingly, or through the failure of textbook developers. . . . (p. 69).

to take dialects into consideration by using the more common core of vocabulary, syntax, and semantics known to most speakers of any variety of English.

Horvath (1977), Goodman and Buck (1973), Burke (1973), and Melmed (1973) reported on studies made with students who, while they are not termed "E.S.L. students," do experience a number of the same difficulties in learning to read Standard English. These are speakers of nonstandard (and usually low status) dialects of English. The majority of the studies were made with speakers of

Black English (B.E.). There are, admittedly, a number of differences between the linguistic situations of a speaker of B.E. and a native speaker of Spanish who is learning English as his second language. Some of the differences are shown in Table 1.

There are, however, numerous similarities between the speech patterns and linguistic situations of B.E. speakers and Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students. Some of these similarities are listed below.

1. Both varieties of speech (Black English and the speech patterns of Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students) are generally considered not only nonstandard, but also of low status.

2. Both groups' speech patterns vary from Standard English in many of the same ways (e.g., phonological, ð (voiced th) > d and θ (voiceless th) > t; morphological omission of final /s/ for third person singular, present tense and possessive; and syntactic, multiple negation, "I didn't say nothing.").

3. The oral reading skills of both groups are likely to be quite "poor" (i.e., likely to include many variations from standard oral English), but their "true" reading skills (i.e., their ability to get meaning from print) can be much better than one might suspect if judging only by the standardness of their oral production.

Table 1

Differences Between B.E. Speakers And
Spanish-Speaking E.S.L. Students

B.E. Speakers	Spanish-Speaking E.S.L. Students
1. "Mother tongue" is a variation of Standard English; B.E. speakers grow up understanding (though not necessarily learning to speak) Standard English.	1. "Mother tongue" and Standard English are mutually unintelligible. Spanish-speakers do not necessarily enter school with even a receptive command of Standard English.
2. First linguists and then educators came to recognize B.E. speakers' language patterns as a stabilized nonstandard dialect of English in its own right.	2. Language patterns of this group are generally viewed as a set of errors caused by interference between Spanish and English; each E.S.L. student's language habits could be thought of as represented by a point on the continuum from (A) native knowledge of Spanish and no knowledge of English, to (B) native-like knowledge of Standard English (value placed on the retention of Spanish language skills varies). A •----x-----x----------x--x------• B

Note: The writer has noted that some bilingual educators use the relatively recently coined term "Chicano English." If this term becomes widely accepted among linguists and educators, this would grant more status to the English speech patterns used by native Spanish-speakers who have achieved a certain degree of competency in English, and whose English speech habits seem to have stabilized at some point other than that of Standard English.

It is therefore this writer's contention that, as a general rule, the findings of studies using speakers of B.E. and other stabilized dialects of English, would apply to a given Spanish-speaking E.S.L. student. More specifically, this writer holds that the aforementioned findings would apply to a given Spanish-speaking E.S.L. student insofar as that particular E.S.L. student's receptive vocabulary of English includes the words and phrases that he is attempting to read, which is often the case, though certainly not always.

Because of the reasons listed above (though not specifically referred to by any of the authors)--several authors did indicate that, although their studies were actually done using speakers of B.E., their findings could to some extent be considered applicable to the reading difficulties of speakers of other nonstandard varieties of English (Horvath, 1977; Goodman and Buck, 1973; and Burke, 1973).

Goodman and Buck (1973) urged teachers of reading to become knowledgeable about their students' dialect(s) and to accept the use of the dialect of the learner in oral reading. They stated that, ". . . clearly if he says in reading what he would say in speaking he is producing an expected response" (p. 7). This applies to phonological, morphological, lexical/semantic, and syntactic deviations from the printed text. The authors emphasized the fact that "teachers have tended to confuse

attempts to change the speech of young learners with teaching them to read" (p. 7). They warned that, when teaching phonics and word-attack skills, teachers need to remember that dialectical differences will affect a student's ability to perceive and reproduce certain minimal pairs (e.g., pin and pen, which have contrasting vowel sounds in some dialects, while not in others). Belaboring such aspects of oral reading "can have no effect on their learning to read except to introduce discomfort, uncertainty, and lack of linguistic confidence" (p. 7). The authors concluded:

> But the most important thing to understand about dialect is that dialect-involved miscues do not interfere with the reading process or the construction of meaning, since they move to the reader's own language. . . . In fact, rejection or correction by the teacher of any dialect-based miscue moves the reader away from using his own linguistic competence to get to meaning toward a closer correspondence to the teacher's expected response to the text. Word for word accuracy, in a narrow sense, becomes the goal, rather than meaning (p. 11).

Horvath (1977) agreed with Goodman and Buck and emphasized the fact that "learning to read and learning to speak Standard English should not be confused," (p. 105) and similarly, that teachers must "not confuse the use of dialect with reading problems" (p. 105). Horvath reported that her findings concerning Black Vernacular English and

Standard English included the following:

> At the risk of oversimplification, we can say that the rules for pronunciation differ but the basic elements of the sentence are the same. These phonological processes often eliminate grammatical categories on the surface. That is, consonant cluster simplification can make it appear that such grammatical features as past tense are not used or understood by a given speaker. This can be disproven easily by demonstrating that the person knows the event took place in the past. . . . (p. 99).

While the findings of a study conducted with speakers of B.E. certainly cannot be applied automatically to Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students, this does raise an important point not previously discussed. That is, it has been clearly established that interference from Spanish in E.S.L. reading should only be considered troublesome insofar as it hinders the student's comprehension of the material read. There is also general agreement that if a student reads orally, "Here is the book" as, "Heere eess da book," there is no cause for alarm or correction, as long as it is ascertained that the reader has understood the meaning of the words. However, as Horvath (1977) pointed out, certain points of phonological interference often eliminate grammatical categories on the surface. When a student reads orally, "I looked for the man's hat" as, "I look for the man hat," special care must be taken to discern whether or

not the student understands that the action has already taken place, and that the object of the search was a hat owned by a particular man. If indeed the student has grasped the meaning of the passage, then the pronunciation "errors" (miscues) have obviously not hindered the student's comprehension, and are therefore harmless. If, however, the oral omission of the final /t/ and /z/ has caused the student to equate the meaning of looked with that of look, and to consider man's as simply an adjective which is not related to possession, then meaning has indeed been affected, and those particular miscues cannot be considered innocuous.

Burke (1973) also found examples of what at times appeared to be morphemic interference which would be expected to alter the meaning of the text for the reader, but which (upon questioning the reader) were determined to be "only a simple alteration of the surface-level grammatical [morphological] structures" (p. 97), which reflected his speech patterns and did not affect his comprehension of the written material. It should be noted that several writers combined the categories of morphological and syntactic interference into one which they labelled either "grammatical" or "structural" (e.g., Burke, 1973; Barker, 1958; and Saville and Troike, 1971). In the case cited above, Burke had given examples

of "structural" interference, most of which were morphological deviations from the printed text. In addition, Burke found numerous lexical variations from Standard English which appeared both in the students' speech and oral reading. Syntactic deviation from the printed text was also found, but it was not as common nor as consistent as the dialect-based phonological, morphological, or lexical substitutions or omissions. However, none of the various types of interference observed seemed to have much effect, if any, on the reader's comprehension of the written material, except when he encountered totally unfamiliar syntactic structures.

Burke concluded:

> None of us needs to abandon our dialect in order to become a reader. . . . Perhaps the most impressive aspect of dialect involvement in oral reading is its paucity at the morphemic and structural levels (p. 99).

Melmed (1973), while making no claim that his findings could be validly applied to Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students, raised some questions which could provide the basis for more research relevant to E.S.L. reading. Melmed dealt with the question of specific phonological features which, because they give rise to "a battery of homonyms which are nonexistent for standard English speakers . . . may affect the oral and silent

reading of Black English speakers" (p. 71). Melmed found these homonyms to "cause reading comprehension interference only when there is a lack of syntactical or context clues in the sentence" (p. 82). This is a question of prime importance to the teaching of E.S.L. reading because of the numerous "false homonyms" which exist for Spanish-speakers in English (e.g., ship/sheep/ chip/cheap, share/chair, base/vase). Unfortunately, however, no sources were found which discussed this problem relative to Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students. Melmed concurred with previously cited authors that:

> Learning to read and reading for meaning should be the primary goals of elementary curriculum programs. Changing speech to standard English pronunciations is a project which should be separated from these goals (p. 82).

READING RATE

Another topic discussed in the literature was the question of an E.S.L. student's reading rate. Numerous studies have provided evidence that reading in a weaker language takes E.S.L. students longer than reading in a stronger language (Ziros, 1976, cited Levinsky, 1972; and García, 1974a, cited Lambert, et al, 1959; and Kolers, 1963). Macnamara (1970) reported that findings of Lambert, Havelka, and Gardner (1959) concurred

with results of his own studies. Macnamara's studies on reading rate concerned not only the rate of oral reading, but also,

> . . . the "input" side, in the rate at which individual words are interpreted, in the rate at which syntactic structures are interpreted, and in ability to anticipate the sequence of words (p. 114).

The importance of an E.S.L student's reading rate, especially in a test situation, was discussed by Macnamara (1970), who suggested that

> . . . the slower rate in the weaker language does not allow him any added leisure for thinking about what he has read; the extra time is fully employed on the task of decoding the language. Consequently, some important points may slip his mind. . . . As a result, the difficulty of the problem is increased; and if the problem is a taxing one, even in the native language, a man is more likely to fail. I have a suspicion that the increase in difficulty of which I speak is even more upsetting for primary school children. . . . (p. 115).

However, at this point, it has not yet been established whether the slower reading rate of E.S.L. students is due to actual linguistic interference from Spanish, or to the fact that their skills in English (i.e., both reading skills and familiarity with the language) are not yet strong enough to process written material in English as rapidly as in Spanish.

While not specifically discussing the above unresolved question, some light was shed on the matter by

Cowan and Sarmad (1976), who,

> . . . assume the validity of Goodman's (1967) psycholinguistic "guessing game" model of reading, which stated (as did Bever, 1970) . . . that native speakers employ various cognitive strategies to produce plausible interpretations of perceptually difficult sentences (p. 374).

Based on this, Cowan and Sarmad suggested that,

> These cognitive strategies, many of which must be language specific, incorporate knowledge of linguistic structure, e.g., clause units and the organization of the constituents of which they are composed. The decoding act, which is reading, takes the form of matching expectations based on these strategies with the actual message. Cowan (1976) has shown that in reading a second language, confusions often arise as a result of the reader's making predictions based on cognitive strategies in the native language (p. 374).

If, indeed, this is a phenomenon typical to E.S.L. reading, it would seem to serve as an explanation of the slower reading rate of E.S.L. reading, and it does possibly point to interference as one of the causes, as well as lack of sufficient knowledge of English.

POSITIVE TRANSFER OF READING SKILLS FROM SPANISH TO ENGLISH

As has been discussed, the majority of the literature would support the argument that, although there do exist numerous points of interference between Spanish and English on all four levels, manifestations of phonological

interference in oral reading should be generally disregarded. Almost all authors cited would agree that more research is needed on those levels which are more likely to affect the reader's comprehension of print, but that current studies do not support the argument that reading comprehension of Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students suffers due to interference from Spanish on the morphological, lexical/semantic, and syntactic levels.

Indeed, Kaufman (1968), in his studies with Mexican-Americans who were taught reading skills in Spanish in two New York City junior high schools, found that not only was there "no reliable evidence of interference from Spanish in the subjects' English reading at either school," but also that there was "some evidence of positive transfer of learning from instruction in reading Spanish to reading ability in English" (p. 527) at one school. Kaufman concluded that,

> The study appears to have the following implications. Planned transfer of learning from Spanish to English has some value for improving reading ability in English of Spanish-English bilinguals who are retarded in reading English (p. 527).

(Note: Kaufman did not use the term "bilingual" to necessarily mean "coordinate bilingual:" his subjects were

> . . . seventh-grade Spanish-speaking pupils whose average reading grades on the sixth grade testing . . . were between 3.5 and 5.0 .

> All had attended New York Schools for three or more years. Spanish was spoken in the home of each subject (p. 522).)

Wagner (1976), a school psychologist, examined bilingual children (degree of bilingualism and number of children not specified) who had been referred to him for the possible detection of learning disabilities. The "reason for referral or the problem was usually stated as 'bilingual interference in reading'" (p. 94). Wagner found that,

> In all instances bilingualism was not at the basis of the reading problem, but the characteristic signs of the dyslexic syndrome [e.g., reversals or auditory deficits] were present in both languages (p. 94).

It was not stated, but it can apparently be assumed that the children with whom Wagner dealt had previously been instructed in reading in their native language. Wagner concluded that,

> In essence, multiple dyslexia appears to imply that the condition shows up in both languages, native and acquired, with differing degrees depending on the mastery of either language and the complexity of the written language system. It also implies that remediation in one language would benefit the other (p. 95).

Wagner advised, however, that the latter phonomenon "begs for more research." It is interesting to note that even severe reading difficulties ("dyslexia") in E.S.L. students cannot, according to Wagner's findings, be

attributed to any interference between the reader's native and second language.

OTHER FACTORS: THE LACK OF SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDES

Thus, the majority of the literature seems to be pointing away from language interference as a major cause for Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students' poor record of achievement as readers of English. If their reading difficulties are not to any great extent caused by language interference (which would indeed seem a very likely suspect) what, then, is the answer? What does the literature indicate should receive at least the major portion of the blame?

It is obvious, of course, that the lack of sufficient comprehension of English to effectively read (i.e., to understand) a given piece of written material in English is a major stumbling block for Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students, especially those who have only recently been exposed to the English language for the first time. Numerous writers advise educators that to remedy this aspect of the problem, the student should be taught to read only those English words and phrases with which he has previously become familiar aurally and orally (Thonis, 1970; Modiano, 1973; Zintz, 1969; Levenson, 1972). But is the only reason for a Spanish-speaking

E.S.L. student's difficulties in learning to read English the fact that he has entered school speaking little or no English? The answer seems to be a definite "no," with other factors appearing equally culpable, if not more so.

García (1974a) offered some suggestions:

> While generalizations are premature at this time, suffice it to conclude that Chicano bilingualism, per se, is not detrimental to the Chicano's English language development. Reasons for the Chicano's reading and language difficulties must be sought among other factors perhaps within a cultural or motivational context (p. 472).

He also reported that Darcy's (1963) study showed that when "socio-environmental variables" were controlled, bilinguals performed as well as monolinguals on verbal and nonverbal instruments. García gave no specific information about the subjects' proficiency in their two languages, so no assumption can be made concerning the number of people tested who would fit into the previously defined category of Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students. However, the results of the study do seem to suggest that socioeconomic status (SES) may be more of a determiner of reading failure or success for E.S.L. students than is language interference.

Mathewson and Pereyra-Suarez (1975) reported:

> It was found that auditory conceptualization shared much variance with SES. [Therefore,] . . . the present study should alert teachers and testers to possible effects of SES in auditory conceptualization. Low SES students may score poorly in

> auditory conceptualization either because they lack general cognitive skills and motivation, or because they lack specific abilities in auditory conceptualization (p. 195).

The authors also stated that,

> Holland (1960) has indicated that reading inability among Mexican-American children may not only be related to a "language barrier," . . . but also to low socioeconomic status (SES) (p. 188).

Ziros (1976) also cited Darcy's 1963 study, which surveyed the research related to bilingualism and cognitive development, and concluded that "the research may have been measuring social effects rather than linguistic ones" (p. 287). Ziros also cited Fishman (1968) and Levinsky (1972) as concluding that the SES variable is an important one in bilingual studies, but has been left out of numerous studies. Ziros concluded that:

> The findings related to syntactic style indicate that socioeconomic variables rather than bilingualism per se may be the prime determinant of English language development (pp. 287-88).

She further suggested that, since numerous test scores are often cited to support the assumption of interference, further studies must be conducted to investigate the social and cultural bias of these standardized instruments. And, finally, Ziros stated that:

> Further investigation must also take place into teacher attitudes toward

> nonstandard dialects and syntactic style and the teaching of reading. If investigators are correct in stating that even for monolinguals the cause of reading problems does not lie so much in linguistic differences as in teachers' attitudes toward children from different socioeconomic classes (De Lorenzo, 1972), then this also warrants attention in dealing with the problems of the bilingual student. In addition, teaching strategies which develop the bilingual's weaker language and work from the strengths of his first language must also be expanded (p. 288).

Leaverton (1973) agreed that the attitude of the teacher of speakers of nonstandard English is of prime importance. He recommended that special attention be paid to:

> . . . the possible negative effect that constant criticism of the child's nonstandard speech patterns can have on the interaction between teacher and child and on the ultimate learning experience (p. 125).

Rystrom (1973) also concluded that:

> . . . speaking a black dialect does not cause reading failure; . . . black remedial students can be taught to read. If we can eliminate our own linguistic biases, we may find that many of the problems in teaching black children to read will disappear (p. 90).

As previously noted, this could also be applied to a large extent to Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students.

Goodman and Buck (1973) made several very strong statements concerning the relative importance of nonstandard speech per se and teachers' attitudes as

determiners of reading success or failure. In the beginning of the article, this "new hypothesis" is offered:

> The only special disadvantage which speakers of low-status dialects suffer in learning to read is one imposed by teachers and schools. Rejection of their dialects and educators' confusion of linguistic difference with linguistic deficiency interferes with the natural process by which reading is acquired and undermines the linguistic self-confidence of divergent speakers (pp. 6-7).

After reporting their findings, the authors concluded:

> In encouraging divergent speakers to use their language competence, both receptive and productive, and accepting their dialect-based miscues, we minimize the effect of dialect differences. In rejecting their dialects we maximize the effect. Rejection, then, and not dialect differences, is the problem educators must overcome to remove the school-imposed disadvantage (pp. 11-12).

Modiano (1973) made a strong statement concerning the role of not only the teacher's attitude, but also the student's resultant attitude toward learning. She noted the feelings of frustration and failure which result from an E.S.L. student being taught to read by a teacher who cannot communicate with him and who, due to her ignorance of the Spanish language and of the language-learning process, continually asks him to do that which he cannot (e.g., pronounce the words without an accent, and understand material which contains numerous English words with which he has had no experience). Modiano stated:

> That these feelings of frustration and failure directly affect the acquisition of reading skills and comprehension have long been recognized. Some have gone so far as to consider attitudinal factors the single most important element in reading achievement (Gregory, 1965; Groff, 1962; and Sopis, 1965-66) (p. 34).

While further research is clearly necessary, a review of the current literature, then, does seem to indicate that, while language interference may be a contributing factor to some of the difficulties encountered in E.S.L reading by Spanish-speakers, language interference in and of itself is not a major cause of these difficulties, and that educators must lay that blame on other factors.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

It seems evident that, to date, there is a definite scarcity of empirical research which deals with the question of Spanish language interference in E.S.L. reading, and that what little research has been conducted has centered around the E.S.L. student's predictable difficulties in the oral reading of English. There is a great need for research that deals with the E.S.L. student's comprehension of that which he reads in English, since it is clearly his comprehension of the meaning, and not his oral skills, that truly will determine to a large extent his success in an English-speaking educational system.

A review of the current literature, then, leads one to the following tentative conclusions:

1. There are indeed numerous points of interference between spoken Spanish and English at the phonological and morphological levels. Interference at the lexical/semantic and syntactic levels is definitely indicated, but is not as well studied.

2. E.S.L. students, as a whole, do experience interference from Spanish in their oral reading of English.

3. Although (2) is rather well documented, its significance is questionable. Most current writers seem to agree that the ability to produce Standard English when reading orally is not a reading skill and that the E.S.L. student's comprehension of the material read is of prime importance.

4. As of yet, the relationship of Spanish language interference to the reading rate of the Spanish-speaking E.S.L. student has not been established.

5. There does exist some evidence of positive transfer of reading skills from Spanish to English.

6. In general, the literature points away from Spanish language interference in E.S.L. reading as the major cause--or even a major cause--of English reading difficulties for Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students. It appears that the lack of sufficient knowledge of English of the E.S.L. students, and their teacher's attitudes towards them and their nonstandard speech habits, are more to blame.

Problems With The Current Literature

As previously indicated, one difficulty encountered in attempting to study the topic was the fact that most authors who discussed Spanish interference in E.S.L. reading addressed only oral reading skills. Another difficulty arose not from the scarcity of material on the topic, but from the quality of the research and reporting that has been done to date. The three factors which, from

this researcher's viewpoint, made several sources not wholly reliable, are as follows:

1. The undefined use of the terms "bilingual" and "bilingualism."

2. Nonlinguistic use of the term "interference," and the failure to distinguish between difficulties arising from interference (linguistic definition) and difficulties arising from a lack of sufficient knowledge of English.

3. Misinterpretation of sources.

Undefined use of terms. The difficulties caused by the undefined use of the term "bilingualism" were noted by two writers. Carrow (1971) discussed "what is termed the 'bilingualism' of the Mexican-American child." She went on to state that:

> In this context, bilingualism is interpreted as exposure to two languages, regardless of the degree of competency. Holland (1960) believes that these children cannot really be thought of as fully bilingual, but rather as substandard or partial speakers of two languages (p. 299).

(Note: the term "nonstandard" is currently preferred to "substandard;" the latter term is judgemental and carries negative connotations.)

García (1974a) noted that the reason such confusion exists over the definition of bilingualism in studies concerning "bilinguals" is that linguists themselves "disagree on the conceptual components of bilingualism."

García went on to state:

> In a survey of more than two decades of research on bilingualism, Jensen (1962) found at least twelve distinctly different definitions of bilingualism. Some linguists defined the bilingual as one who has the ability to speak two languages, or one who has native-like control of two languages. Some defined a bilingual person as one who has been exposed to two languages. . . . scholars are very much in disagreement as to what the term means, and . . . Weinreich's classic coordinate compound distinction (1953) must be much more closely examined (p. 471).

However, the fact that there is no universally agreed-upon definition of the word bilingual would seem to make it an obvious necessity for any writer who uses the term "bilingual" to provide his reader with his working definition of the term, and it is ironic to note that García himself did not do so.

In two articles, García (1974a and b) repeatedly used the terms "Chicano bilingualism," and Spanish-English bilingualism, but he did not specify what levels of proficiency in the two languages he had in mind when using these terms. He also referred to the Chicano's "bilingual language strategy that provides him communication mobility in both Spanish- and English-speaking communities" (1974b, p. 34).

While vague, the latter description of Chicano's language abilities would seem to indicate that Chicanos in general could be considered bilinguals fully

proficient in both languages. However, the examples that García gave of Chicanos' speech habits (i.e., "Vamos pa la dance," and "Your mother is planching.") would seem instead to classify Chicanos in general as speakers of "Spanglish" (a term used by educators to refer to an indiscriminant mixture of Spanish and English) rather than as coordinate bilinguals. This would lead one to question exactly what type of "communication mobility" such a speaker would enjoy outside of the barrio.

There are numerous indications that Garcia used the term "bilingual" in the loosest sense possible (i.e., meaning that the person had simply been exposed to the two languages) though this was never explicitly stated. In reporting the results of a study by Barrera-Vasquez (1953) with children who were monolingual Tarascan speakers at the beginning of the study, García (1974a) discussed the "bilinguals" who were initially taught in the vernacular.

Similarly, in his 1974b article, García reported Peña's findings in a 1967 study, and used the term "Chicano first graders" to describe the group of students who apparently demonstrated their skill with Spanish and English syntactic patterns. However, in his 1974a article, García reported that the study was conducted with

"Chicano first graders" but stated that it was the "bilingual first graders" who demonstrated their linguistic ability with syntactic patterns.

A person who has read both of García's articles (1974a and b) would likely conclude that the author used the terms "Chicano first graders" and "bilingual first graders" interchangeably in his 1974a article. However, one who reads only the 1974a article may well conclude that, whereas the "bilingual" Chicano first graders demonstrated a high level of skill in using Spanish and English syntactic patterns, the nonbilingual Chicano first graders were unable to do so. Such confusion could be easily avoided by providing the reader with the writer's working definition of the terms "bilingual" and "bilingualism."

Nonlinguistic use of the term "interference"; Failure to distinguish between interference and insufficient knowledge of English. Since a number of educators and several writers (Venezky and Chapman, 1973; Modiano, 1973) have not recognized the fine distinction between English language and reading difficulties caused by interference from Spanish, and those difficulties caused by an insufficient knowledge of English, perhaps an illustration of this difference would serve to help clarify the issue in the reader's mind.

"Interference." When the Spanish-speaking E.S.L. student reads the sentence, "The book is in the desk," he

may well misunderstand the location of the book because he is likely to connect "in" with the Spanish "en" which can mean either "in" or "on".

"Insufficient knowledge of English." The student will again be likely to misunderstand the meaning of the word "in" when he reads the sentence, "The boys finally gave in." However, the confusion this time will not be at all due to his previously-learned Spanish. Instead, it will be due to the idiomatic use of the word "in"; the student whose knowledge of English does not at that time include the idiom "to give in" will not comprehend the role of the word "in" in that phrase for that reason alone, and not because of any actual interference from Spanish.

As previously indicated, Modiano (1973) was one writer who either did not recognize the distinction described above, or who chose to disregard it. Modiano claimed that the use of a foreign language interferes with the acquisition of English reading skills "in every way." She used as examples the facts that the student:

> . . . can understand only the most rudimentary type of instruction when his teacher speaks in a foreign language. . . . he seldom can link the sounds and the symbols meaningfully. What he learns, he learns by rote. The lack of vocabulary and nonmastery of grammatical structures greatly impede his comprehension of what he does read (p. 35).

Modiano sought to further support her argument by citing studies by numerous writers, which indicated that indeed an individual "perceives and remembers only that which has meaning for him" (p. 31). She also cited a 1926 study by West and a 1962 study by Jan-Fausch as supportive of the conclusion that "knowledge of vocabulary was the single most important factor affecting reading comprehension" (p. 33). Another factor which Modiano concluded to be important to reading comprehension has been described by numerous writers as mastery of grammatical clues and understanding of verbal relationships. It does follow, then, that a person who does not know the vocabulary and/or who is "ignorant of the subleties and nuances of its structure, is at a serious disadvantage" (Modiano, 1973, p. 34).

While the difficulties described by Modiano are certainly experienced by a number of Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students, the fact that she attributes these difficulties to actual interference from Spanish seems inconsistent with the definitions of language interference given and used by linguists. Mackey (1968) stated that the term "interference" refers to the questions, "How well does the bilingual keep his languages apart?" and "To what extent does he fuse them together?" (p. 555). He

further stated, "Interference is the use of features belonging to one language while speaking or writing another" (p. 569). (Note: While interference is more easily observable in the expressive skills that Mackey listed, we have seen how more recent studies have attempted to deal with the existence of interference in the receptive skills of listening and reading.) Saville and Troike (1971) defined interference as:

> . . . how one of a bilingual's languages influences his use of the other--the use of non-native sounds, constructions, or word choices as a result of influence from the native language (p. 7).

They further stated that:

> . . . problems of perception and use of a second language which arise from the language habits of the speaker are termed interference (p. 13).

In view of these definitions, we can conclude that the difficulties described by Modiano, while very real and serious, are not in fact due to language interference from Spanish, but instead, are due to the student's lack of sufficient knowledge of English.

As previously indicated, Venezky and Chapman (1973) also did not use the linguistic definition of interference in their statement that:

> In learning to process print correctly, the only possibility for dialect interference is that which arises indirectly from a failure of the teaching interaction, through a failure to comprehend each other (p. 65).

It would seem that if a writer who is discussing linguistic behavior chooses to use a definition of the term "interference" other than the linguistic definition, that he or she should provide the reader with that alternate working definition.

Therefore, writers who claim that previous knowledge of Spanish interferes with the acquisition of English reading skills, and educators who argue that the E.S.L. student needs to forget his Spanish in order to become a good reader of English, need to do two things:

1. Define exactly what they mean by the term interference, and

2. recognize that there is a definite distinction between reading difficulties caused by interference (when the linguistic definition of the term is used) and those difficulties caused by the fact that quite often the E.S.L. reader is simply not yet familiar enough with the English language to derive the same benefit from a given piece of written material as would a native speaker of English.

Misinterpretation of sources. As previously indicated, there were numerous examples in the literature of the misinterpretation of sources, which tended to raise the question of the general reliability of the articles in which the examples were found.

Mathewson and Pereyra-Suarez (1975) misinterpreted Carrow (1971), but the difficulty seems to lie in the nonlinguistic use of the term interference. Mathewson and Pereyra-Suarez stated that Carrow (1971) showed syntactic interference from Spanish in the language habits of E.S.L. students. However, a close reading of Carrow's article revealed no reference to interference. The stated purposes of Carrow's study were:

> 1. to compare the comprehension of English with that of Spanish in a group of preschool Mexican-American children;
>
> 2. to analyze the developmental sequences of the two languages in these children; and
>
> 3. to compare these developmental sequences of both languages in the children under study with the performance of a group of English-speaking children reported earlier (Carrow, 1968) (p. 300).

There was no conclusion that interference was the cause of any language difficulties; nor, indeed, was there any reference to language interference in the analysis, results, or discussion of the study.

García (1974b) expressed the opinion that:

> . . . judging from the scant research that has been conducted on the syntactic level, the inference that the Chicano does not experience syntactic interferences when he is speaking English is defensible (p. 37).

To support this position, García cited studies by Barker (1958) and Coltharp (1965), and stated that these studies "report that no interferences were discovered with

the syntactic patterns of the Chicanos they studied" (p. 36). This statement would lead the reader to conclude that both Coltharp and Baker did research concerning the dialect of English spoken by selected groups of Chicanos, and that they found no syntactic interference from Spanish (Baker's and Coltharp's studies were made with sub-groups of the Chicanos living in Tucson, Arizona and El Paso, Texas, respectively).

However, the dialect of English spoken by their subjects was not the object of either study. Instead, what was studied in each case was a variant of Spanish which was spoken by these sub-groups of Chicanos. Barker described the variant he studied, "Pachuco," as a secret language or jargon, and stated that,

> The speakers of Pachuco are very largely adolescents and young men of Mexican descent who move in lower-class (i.e., lower socioeconomic) social circles (p 16).

Barker also stated that, although Pachuco is basically a variant of Spanish, other "Spanish-speaking people living in Tucson find it almost as unintelligible as do English-speaking people" (p. 13).

Coltharp (1965) also noted that Caló (the term used for the variant of Spanish that she studied) was "equally unintelligible to the English-speaking as to the Spanish-speaking" (p. 31). Similarly, as with the Pachuco of

Barker's study, Calo was described as an argot or cant (a more or less "secret language") used by the lower socioeconomic classes and by the underworld; most of its users are young people.

It would appear, then, that the studies made by Barker and Coltharp did not, in fact, offer support for García's tentative conclusion that "the Chicano does not experience syntactic interferences when he is speaking English" (García, 1974b, p. 37).

Modiano (1973) attributed an additional reading problem to language interference which, in the present writer's opinion, can neither be attributed to interference in the linguistic sense, nor--both according to other writers and to the present writer's classroom experience--can the difficulty be attributed to the lack of sufficient knowledge of English. Specifically, Modiano gave as an example of language interference the "fact" that an E.S.L student "cannot perceive the letters and visual configurations by which the words are represented" (p. 35). She went on to state: And if he does perceive them, he has difficulty remembering what he has seen (Mewhort, 1967; Mewhort, Merikle, and Bryden, 1969; Reicher, 1969; and Wheeler, 1970)" (p. 31). A review of the latter three sources yielded possible support for the claim that it is easier to perceive and

remember visual stimuli which contain meaning for the viewer. However, none of these three studies used E.S.L. students nor speakers of nonstandard dialects of English as subjects, nor did the authors make any mention of E.S.L. students, much less any claims concerning the applicability of their findings to the teaching of E.S.L. reading. In addition, Venezky and Chapman (1973) do address the problem directly, and offered a conclusion that is opposite to that of Modiano's. The former authors noted that, in order to learn to read, one necessary skill is that of visually discriminating and matching letters and words. They stated:

> The fact that the child speaks a nonstandard dialect is unrelated to this aspect of the reading task. . . . the visual skills required for reading are not only dialect independent, but they are also culture independent (p. 65).

CONCLUSIONS BASED ON CURRENT LITERATURE

In conclusion, it seems evident that there does not yet exist a very substantial body of quality research on the topic of Spanish interference in E.S.L. reading. Indeed, numerous writers in the field stated that more research is still needed on all aspects of language interference, with the exception of phonological interference in the speech habits of E.S.L. students.

Table 2 has been constructed as a visual summary of which writers maintained that Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students do (or do not) experience interference from their Spanish in various English language skills. Excluded from the table are discussions and examples of interference by writers who did not base those particular conclusions upon the linguistic definition of interference (i.e., who confused interference with a lack of sufficient knowledge of English). Reports of studies which were conducted with speakers of other dialects of English, rather than Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students, are indicated by an asterisk.

ADDITIONAL CONCLUSIONS BASED ON CURRENT LITERATURE AND THIS WRITER'S EXPERIENCES

The following table (Table 3) incorporates both the research findings previously discussed, and this writer's experiences (both in and out of the classroom) with the language habits of Spanish-speaking E.S.L. students.

As previously discussed, difficulties in oral reading, such as substitutions or omissions of phonemes--and even of lexical/semantic and syntactic items--are simply manifestations of the student's nonstandard speech habits, and generally have no effect upon the student's

Table 2

Conclusions Based on Current Literature

Type of Interference from Spanish experienced by Spanish-speaking E.S.L. Students	Listening, Speaking, & Writing		Accuracy of Oral Reading		Reading Comprehension		Reading Comprehension in General or "Reading Ability" in General	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Phonological (pronunciation/ articulation, intonation)	Modiano Mathewson & Pereyra-Suarez Olguin Ziros Saville & Troike García		Olguin Saville & Troike Goodman & Buck* Horvath* Melmed*		Melmed* (Yes, only when false homonyms arise and there is a lack of sufficient context clues.)		Cowan & Sarmad*	Mathewson & Pereyra-Suarez Goodman & Buck* Burke* Kaufman Wagner Ziros (qualified no: currently not enough research to s yes, but the possibility must continue to be tested.)
Morphological (word structure; bound morphemes: affixed & other markers of number, gender, tense, person, possession, etc.)	Ziros Saville & Troike García Burke*		Goodman & Buck* Horvath* Burke*			Horvath*		
Lexical/Semantic (vocabulary: words and their meanings)	Ziros Saville & Troike Mathewson & Pereyra-Suarez García Burke*		Goodman & Buck*					
Syntactical (sentence structure, word order)	Olguin Saville & Troike Mathewson & Pereyra-Suarez	García	Goodman & Buck* Burke* (But not as common as on other levels.)		Burke* (Yes, only in cases wherein the reader encounters totally unfamiliar syntactic structures.)			

*Indicates that the author reported on studies not made with Spanish-speakers, but with speakers of languages or dialects other than Standard English.

Table 3

Additional Conclusions Based on Current Literature and This Writer's Experiences

Type of Interference from Spanish Experienced by Spanish-speaking E.S.L. Students, with examples	Effect on English Language Skills		
	Speaking, Writing, Listening, and Oral Reading	Reading Comprehension	
		Group A Spanish-speakers with very little or no reading skills in Spanish	Group B Spanish-speakers with reading skills in Spanish
Phonological			
1. pronunciation/articulation e.g., schwa, aspiration, Olguin's "30 demons"	Yes	No*	No*
2. intonation	Yes	No	No
Morphological (word structure; bound morphemes: affixes and other markers of number, gender, tense, person, possession, etc.) e.g., Mark's friends wanted to ride.	Yes	No*	No*
Lexical/Semantic (vocabulary: words and their meanings)			
1. false cognates, e.g., assist/asistir (attend), exit/éxito (success), embarrassed/embarazada (pregnant), attend/atender (take care of)	Yes	Yes (But less likely than Group B)	Yes
2. differences in the semantic categorization of reality, e.g., cucumber and pickle vs. pepino and pepino (en vinagre) toes and fingers vs. dedos and dedos (del pie), and indeed vs. Ø (no term in Spanish functions in quite the same way).	Yes	Yes	Yes
Syntactical (sentence structure, word order) e.g., "the red ball" vs. "la pelota roja" results in "the ball red." "He is a doctor" vs. "Él es doctor" results in "He is doctor." "She did not come" vs. "Ella no vino" results in "She no come."	Yes	No*	No*
Graphophonic (interference in decoding [word attack] skills)	Pertains only to Oral Reading and Writing		
1. letter-sounds, e.g., Spanish letter-sounds for a, soft g, h, i, j, ll, qu, r, rr, v, x, z, and English rules for long and short vowels, etc.	Yes	No	Yes
2. Spanish vs. English spelling rules, patterns, and exceptions (e.g., vowels [single, and two together], consonants [single, and in a group] silent letters, syllabication and stress rules, and exceptions to all preceding categories)	Yes	No	Yes
3. punctuation (differing uses of ¿?, ¡!,—," ", and apostrophe)	Yes	No	Yes

*This is a qualified "no." Exceptions are discussed in the following section. (Note: As previously discussed, the "yes's" indicate that a Spanish-speaking E.S.L. student is likely to experience difficulties caused by interference from Spanish. Whether he actually does or not, will depend upon (1) the level of his English language skills (i.e., all the "yes's" should gradually change to "no's" for a particular student, as his skills increase), and (2) the existence of sufficient context clues also helps change "yes's" to "no's.")

comprehension of the material read. (Discussions of exceptions to this general rule are found later in this chapter.) For this reason, oral reading skills are placed in the same category as speaking skills, rather than being considered under the "Reading" category, and are not specifically discussed. It should be noted that it is, of course, more difficult to determine when interference has occurred in true reading skills (i.e., in the student's comprehension of material read either silently or orally). The only way of detecting the existence of interference in reading comprehension is to check frequently to ascertain whether or not the student is indeed receiving the meaning of the material used.

Also, as previously discussed, there is a distinct difference between problems in reading (comprehension) caused by actual interference from Spanish, and those problems caused by the reader's lack of sufficient knowledge of English to deal with a given reading selection. As with the previous table, those reading difficulties which are due to the lack of sufficient knowledge of English and are not caused by the reader's Spanish language skills, are excluded from consideration on the table. This is because the table deals only with examples and types of language interference and the effect of this interference on English language skills.

It should be noted, however, that a given student's level or degree of proficiency in English will affect the answers on Table 3 in a different manner. The Spanish-speaking E.S.L. student moves along the continuum (see Table 1) from being first a non-English speaker, then a compound bilingual with steadily increasing English language skills, and (hopefully) finally arrives at a point in time at which he has achieved native-like mastery of English, becoming a coordinate bilingual. As the student's English language skills increase, the amount of interference from Spanish that he experiences will predictably decrease, until such a time as that individual becomes a coordinate bilingual. At that time, he would no longer be classified as an E.S.L. student, and should experience only a minimal amount of interference from Spanish in his English language skills. Therefore, all of the "yes's" on Table 3 should gradually change to "no's" for any given E.S.L. student as his English language skills increase.

At all places on the table, a "yes" indicates that a Spanish-speaking E.S.L. student <u>is likely to</u> experience certain interference-based difficulties in the various English language skills described, but does not indicate that he necessarily <u>will</u>. Whether he actually does or

does not experience such difficulties will depend upon two factors;

1. his knowledge of and familiarity with English (as previously discussed), which would include what might be described as his individual style of language learning, and

2. in the receptive skills (i.e., listening and reading comprehension), the amount of context clues available (i.e., words, phrases, and even sentences with which an E.S.L student would experience difficulties in one context because of interference from Spanish, might be comprehended perfectly well in another context which contains sufficient context clues to convey the meaning of the otherwise troublesome items). In the expressive skills (speaking, writing, and oral reading), the amount of context clues provided by the E.S.L. student for his listener or reader will also largely determine whether or not the listener or reader is able to comprehend the E.S.L. student's message in spite of the interference-based difficulties.

The following is a discussion of answers on Table 3.

Phonology

Pronunciation/articulation. This writer holds that the "accent" of an E.S.L. student who is reading orally is not rightly considered a reading problem, but

rather a problem with an oral language skill which is an important E.S.L. skill, but which should be kept out of the reading lesson lest the students become confused about the purpose of reading.

As indicated on Table 3, there are a few exceptions to the above statement. Only in the relatively few cases wherein the mispronunciation of a word (when read orally, or in the reader's "mind's ear," when read silently) results in the loss of comprehension of material read, can this skill be considered at all related to reading. An example of such a case would be when false homonyms (such as ship/sheep/chip/cheep) result from the mispronunciation of a word. (See section on graphophonic interference for a discussion of problems arising from gross mispronunciation which usually results in a nonword, and the factor of whether or not the student attaches meaning to it.) For example, the E.S.L. student may read (aloud or silently, but mediated) "The ship is big," and mentally picture a large, woolly animal. Therefore, teachers of E.S.L. readers should be aware that these students will at times have more homonyms to contend with than a native English-speaker, and should check the students' comprehension when a mispronunciation produces a false homonym. However, this should be considered no more serious a problem than when a native English-speaker's reading comprehension

suffers from confusion of homonyms. Both the native English-speaker and the E.S.L. student should be repeatedly encouraged to use context clues.

Intonation. To paraphrase a previous quote (Platt, 1977), the vocal action (overt or covert) of intonation is really not necessary for reading with understanding. Proper intonation, like pronunciation/articulation, is an E.S.L. oral language skill, and not an E.S.L. reading skill.

Morphological

An E.S.L. student will, in his oral production, often omit or substitute letters and groups of letters which are bound morpehmes in standard English, due to difficulties in articulation and/or to morphemic differences between Spanish and English. However, this does not necessarily mean that he does not understand the use or meaning of, for example, the past tense or the possessive case. Instead, as in phonology, false homonyms are often created. If the student does, indeed, receive the meaning conveyed by these morphemes in the words and sentences he reads (either orally or silently), then the student does not have a morpheme-related reading problem. In some cases, however, the E.S.L. reader may lose the meaning of what he reads if he becomes confused by, for example, the use of "'s" to signal possessives (which

differs greatly from the Spanish marking of possessives). In these cases, it could be said that the student is experiencing an interference-based E.S.L. reading difficulty. A teacher of E.S.L. readers should therefore check as often as she feels necessary to determine whether the students are being confused by the false homonyms, and/or whether they are comprehending the meaning conveyed by those morphemes which are frequently omitted or substituted when read orally.

The "no" on Table 3 for both Groups A and B was a qualified one because of the following reason. A reader who is a good decoder and who looks carefully enough at each word to let all the morphemes register will not experience any interference from his knowledge of Spanish (except possibly as it would affect comprehension). However, once the reader catches on to the "reading as a guessing game" approach, then his oral reading production will likely include whatever morphological errors the reader makes when speaking English.

Lexical/Semantic

False cognates. (Discussion pertains especially to Group B.) Despite their graphic similarity, some false cognates are pronounced very differently, such as the English "come" (/kʌm/), and the Spanish "come"

(/ko-me/: eats). But when the E.S.L. reader sees an English word which in its graphic form closely resembles a Spanish word (especially one which he has previously learned to read in that language), he may well be misled to think that the words are also closely alike in meaning. However, use of context clues should prevent a large number of comprehension errors of this nature.

The sight of a cognate (whether a true or false one) can also make it harder for the E.S.L. reader of Group B to remember to use the English letter-sounds rather than the Spanish. However, in the case of true cognates, if "indivisible" is read with the Spanish pronunciation, but the reader indicates in some way that he does recognize its meaning, this writer again recommends that the mispronunciation be disregarded during the reading lesson.

Differences in the semantic categorization of reality. The perceptions and descriptions of reality found in English and Spanish do not always exactly coincide, as is seen in the examples given in Table 3. These differences do cause problems for the Spanish-speaker learning English, and, specifically, may indeed impair his reading comprehension.

When there is no exact equivalent in Spanish for terms used or semantic distinctions made in English, the E.S.L. student will likely have difficulty in

remembering these terms and semantic distinctions in English. A process seems to occur in the student's mind similar to that which Saville and Troike (1970) described with relation to phonological interference; that is, lexical/semantic items seem to be "unconsciously and automatically pigeonholed in one of the pre-existing categories of the native language" (p. 13). For example, the Spanish way of viewing fingers--dedos--and toes--dedos (del pie)-- and also cucumbers--pepinos--and pickles--pepinos (en vinagre) (a term which is commonly used locally)--as slightly differing variations of basically the same items, interferes with the English way of viewing them as totally different items whose names have nothing in common. (Note: The reader should not conclude that English is a much more specific language than Spanish, for there are numerous cases wherein Spanish makes semantic distinctions which do not exist in English (Mosel, 1945). However, those cases do not fall within the scope of this paper.)

Similarly, terms in English which have no one exact translation in Spanish (e.g., "indeed") cause E.S.L. students considerably more difficulty than do terms such as "dog" or "eat." However, this is a slightly different type of interference, if in fact it could even be considered as such. That is, an E.S.L. student

who is struggling with learning the meaning and use of "indeed" experiences no direct interference from previously learned terms in Spanish. However, the fact that Spanish does not have a term that functions in the same was as does "indeed" in English, could possibly be considered interference from Spanish, since it is therefore more difficult to master that particular lexical/semantic item.

However, the fact of seeing the troublesome words and phrases in print does not add to the difficulty of comprehending them, but may in fact even aid the E.S.L. reader by providing a visual representation of the words, which may be studied repeatedly for as long as he desires.

Syntactical

As in Morphological, syntactical deviations from the printed page in the oral reading of English may at times "arise as a result of the reader's making predictions based on cognitive strategies in the native language" (Cowan and Sarmad, 1976, p. 374). Such dialect- or interference-based miscues should be considered oral language difficulties, and not reading difficulties. Indeed, such miscues are generally an indication of the reader's understanding of the written material, and should be considered a reading strength.

However, as above, when the E.S.L. reader does not comprehend what he reads because he becomes confused by English word order patterns which conflict with those of Spanish, it could again be said that the student is experiencing an interferenced-based E.S.L. reading difficulty. It is interesting to note that syntactical interference seems to be the first type of interference to disappear as the student's English language skills increase.

Graphophonic

Letter-sounds. While Group A will have no special problems when decoding words containing letters which represent very different sounds in Spanish and English, it is true that E.S.L. students literate in Spanish are likely to experience some difficulties until they learn the English letter-sounds well, and learn to remember which sounds are appropriate in which context.

Spanish vs. English spelling, syllabication, and stress: rules, patterns, and exceptions. Even once the English letter-sounds have been learned, E.S.L. students who have previously learned to react to (and decode) the letter sequences and environments found in Spanish will likely find that this knowledge at times interferes with their attempts to decode English words. This is because

the sound of any given letter in an English word may vary greatly, depending upon the surrounding letters--or for no discernible reason. For those who are accustomed to the virtually one-to-one sound/symbol relationships in Spanish and the very regular rules for syllabication and stress, these many rules and exceptions will likely be difficult to adjust to.

To illustrate this fact, Table 4 lists those letter sequences and environments (spelling patterns) and rules for syllabication and stress which govern the decoding of Spanish words in contrast to those which govern the decoding of English words.

At this point, the researcher wishes to emphasize the fact that it is recognized that not each and every E.S.L. student will need to master every decoding skill listed; some students will be able to deduce patterns unconsciously. In addition to this, the use of context clues most often helps eliminate the need to completely decode words that are familiar aurally, but unfamiliar in their written form. Words that are also unfamiliar in their spoken form present an even more difficult task since the student will not know when his decoding attempts have produced a nonword (e.g., "iron" pronounced as "eedoan"). However, if he still manages to connect that word with the proper concept through the help of context

Table 4

Spanish vs. English Sound/Symbol Relationships

Spanish	English
1. Sound/symbol correspondence	1. Sound/symbol correspondence
A. vowels	A. vowels
1. single vowels	1. single vowels
a. 1 letter = 1 sound	a. letter ≠ 1 sound, nor vice versa
b. each vowel sound clear and distinct	b. vowels in unstressed syllables = schwas
	c. r, l, with w-controlled vowels
2. two vowels together: diphthongs (only exceptions: ue and ui when preceded by g or q)	2. two vowels together a. 1st long, 2nd silent b. digraph c. diphthong d. irregular vowel patterns
B. consonants	B. consonants
1. single consonants	1. single consonants
a. hard and soft c (/k/, /s/)	a. hard and soft c (/k/, /s/)
b. hard and soft g (/g/, /x/)	b. hard and soft g (/g/, /ǰ/)
c. x = /s/, /ks/, /gs/, or /x/	c. x = /z/, /ks/, or /gs/
	d. s = /s/, /z/, /š/, or /ž/
	e. t = /t/, /š/, or /č/
2. consonant digraphs	2. consonant digraphs
a. ch = /č/ (but lower breath level than in English)	a. ch = /č/, /š/, or /k/
b. ll = /y/	b. ll ≠ digraph (=/l/)
c. rr = /r̄/	c. rr ≠ digraph (=/r/)
	d. sh = /š/
	e. th = /θ/ or /ð/
	f. wh = /hw/
	g. gh = /f/ or silent
	h. ph = /f/
	i. wr = /r/
	j. kn = /n/
	k. gn = /n/
C. silent letters	C. silent letters
1. vowels: none	1. vowels: numerous examples
2. consonants: h always, p very rarely, none others	2. consonants: numerous examples
2. Syllabication and Stress	2. Syllabication and Stress
A. syllabication: simple regular rules	A. syllabication: rules are complex, with numerous exceptions
B. stress: regular rules, with a written accent mark (´) used to denote exceptions	B. stress: numerous rules, many exceptions, numerous cases of dual possibilities, no orthographic marks to aid readers
3. Exceptions to the Above: none	3. Exceptions to the Above: many, especially in numerous commonly-used words

clues, the gross mispronunciation of the word would properly be considered an oral language difficulty, and not a reading problem. Or, indeed, many an efficient E.S.L. reader will, when reading silently, not even attempt to connect the printed word with a set of phonemes, but instead, directly to the word's meaning, by using context clues. In this case, decoding skills play no part in the reading process. As previously discussed, native English-speakers who are efficient readers of English often use this same strategy.

Punctuation. Group B might initially find it difficult to respond to question marks and exclamation points in reading English (i.e., understand that a given sentence is a question or an exclamatory statement), since these students are accustomed to being forewarned of the existence of such sentences by the placement of inverted question marks and exclamation points at the beginnings of the sentences in Spanish. Once the Group B student becomes accustomed to this, he will learn (as must the native English-speaking beginning reader) to recognize which contexts and syntactic patterns are signals of or clues to the appropriate meaning (and intonation), for oral reading purposes.

The uses of the long, connected dash (——) in English may also cause a bit of initial confusion for the student

who is previously literate in Spanish, since this punctuation mark is used in roughly the same way that quotation marks are used in English (e.g., — No importa — sonrió el señor importante — .' Ahí no conozco a nadie (Almazán, 1972, p. 75). Translation: "It doesn't matter," smiled the important man. "I don't know anyone there.") Some additional amount of confusion may be caused by the fact that quotation marks are also used in Spanish, but only to enclose a direct quote from a source, or for emphasis of isolated words or phrases. (A discussion of punctuation rules in Spanish was found in Marín, 1948.)

Apostrophes are not used in standard written Spanish, but are occasionally used when an author wishes to record nonstandard Spanish speech patterns (e.g., — Sí, señor. Pa' [Para] servir a usted. (Almazán, 1976, p. 147). Translation: "Yes, sir. At your service.") Those relatively few students in Group B who are familiar with the use of the apostrophe in Spanish to denote deleted letters should experience positive transfer of this knowledge to the use of apostrophes in English for contractions. However, those students may also experience some negative transfer (i.e., interference) when initially learning about the additional use of apostrophes in English to signify the possessive case.

Those students from both Groups A and B who were previously unfamiliar with the use of apostrophes in Spanish should experience zero transfer (i.e., no interference, nor positive transfer) when introduced to their uses in English.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Do's And Don'ts For Teaching E.S.L. Reading to Native Speakers of Spanish

It is this writer's hope that this paper has made clear which specific English reading difficulties experienced by E.S.L. students are due to interference between English and Spanish, and which are not. When interference-based difficulties do arise, it would be of great benefit for the teacher of E.S.L. reading to know enough about Spanish so that she can understand the cause of the difficulties. She can then explain to the student why he is having those particular difficulties, and what he needs to keep in mind about English to help avoid such difficulties in the future. She can then help him learn not to use (while reading English) those skills which apply only to Spanish, and help him to recognize the double value of and to reinforce those skills which do apply to both languages.

Below is offered a list of "do's" and "don'ts" which will hopefully prove useful to teachers of E.S.L. reading to native speakers of Spanish. This list of suggestions is by no means exhaustive, and could certainly receive numerous valid additions from teachers experienced in the field.

Don't

1. Don't use an E.S.L. student's proficiency in oral reading as the sole or major means of judging his reading skills in English.

2. Don't confuse the teaching of reading with the teaching of Standard English speech habits; during the reading lesson, do not correct a reader's pronunciation or other speech habits. If this is done, he may well become confused about the purpose of reading (i.e., "making the right sounds" vs. "getting the message of the print").

3. Don't become overly concerned when the mispronunciation of a word results in a "false homonym;" simply check to ascertain whether or not comprehension has been impaired.

4. Don't assume that the gross mispronunciation of words (resulting in "nonwords"), the omission of morphemes, or changes in lexical/semantic or syntactic items necessarily prevents the reader from comprehending the printed material; again, determine whether or not the

student has attached the correct meaning to the printed words.

Do

1. Remember that, as the E.S.L. student is expected to read increasingly difficult material, his aural/oral base of familiarity with English must steadily increase in order to maintain a linguistic base for his reading efforts in English.

2. Check constantly for comprehension, whether the student deviates in any way from the printed text or not; many students previously literate in Spanish do become good decoders of English print, but often understand only a small portion of material which they are able to read orally with a deceptive amount of accuracy.

3. Use a variety of means to ascertain whether or not an E.S.L. student has indeed understood that which he has read. A few suggestions follow: ask the student to (a) explain it in other words, (b) define a word or phrase in question, (c) use the word or phrase in question in another sentence, or (d) have him illustrate or act out that certain aspect of the material read.

4. Repeatedly encourage the E.S.L. student to rely heavily on context clues for meaning, especially when "false homonyms" cause difficulties.

5. Become familiar enough with the Spanish language and with the points of interference between the two languages to know which miscues in oral reading are based on the student's previous knowledge of Spanish.

6. Accept the use of the student's nonstandard speech patterns in oral reading; remember that if a student says in reading orally what he would say in speaking, he is producing an acceptable response. This applies to phonological, morphological, lexical/semantic, and syntactic deviations from the printed text.

7. Remember that, while an E.S.L. student will often omit letters when reading orally which are morphemes in Standard English, this does not necessarily mean that he does not understand the use (for example) of the past tense or the possessive.

8. Be aware of false cognates which can potentially cause problems and point out true cognates which do aid in comprehension.

9. When working with students previously literate in Spanish, be aware of the ways in which they are accustomed to reacting to letters, various letter combinations (spelling patterns), and punctuation marks. As the occasions arise, discuss those graphic cues with which the students are experiencing difficulties, and again encourage the students to use context clues, as well as

their aural knowledge of English, as aids in decoding.

10. When teaching phonics, remember that the student's Spanish language background will affect his ability to perceive certain minimal pairs (e.g., fit/ feet).

11. If it can be done without making the student self-conscious, make a list of words mispronounced while reading orally; work on these words during the oral E.S.L. lesson. However, remember to "listen past" these words during the reading lesson, and concentrate on the student's comprehension of the material read.

12. Let the students know that you want them to learn their English language skills in addition to their Spanish language skills, not as a replacement for them. That is, the students should understand that the major key to their success as readers of English is <u>not</u> the "forgetting" of their Spanish for the purpose of ridding themselves of interference-based difficulties in English; rather, the major key to their reading success in English is the acquisition of sufficient familiarity with and knowledge of English to deal effectively with written material in English.

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